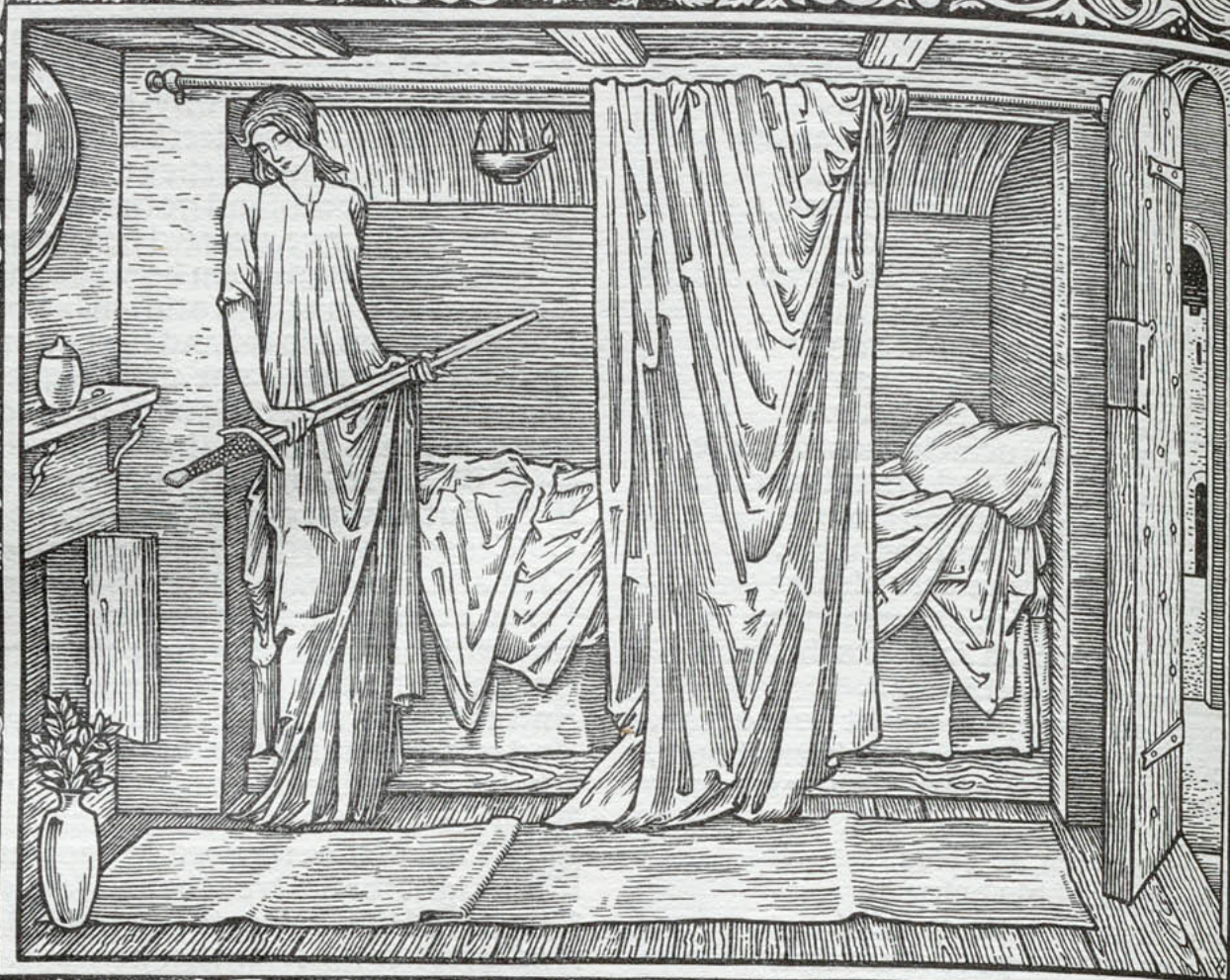


INCIPIT LEGENDA LUCRECIE ROME MARTIRIS.



MOOT I SEYN THE EXILING OF
kinges
Of Rome, for hir horrible doinges,
And of the laste king Tarquinius,
As saith Ovyde and Titus Livius.
But for that cause telle I nat this storie,
But for to preise and drawn to memorie
The verray wyf, the verray trewe Lucesse,

That, for her wyfhood and her stedfast-
nesse,
Nat only that thise payens her comende,
But he, that cleped is in our legende
The grete Austin, hath greet compassioun
Of this Lucesse, that starf at Rome toun;
And in what wyse, I wol but shortly trette,
And of this thing I touche but the grete.
WHAN Ardea beseged was aboute
With Romains, that ful sterne were
and stoute,
ful longe lay the sege, and litel wroghte,
So that they were half ydel, as hem thoghte;
And in his pley Tarquinius the yonge
Gan for to jape, for he was light of tonge,
And seyde, that It was an ydel lyf;
No man did ther no more than his wyf;
And lat us speke of wyves, that is best;
Praise every man his owne, as him lest,
And with our speche lat us ese our herte.
A KNIGHT, that highte Colatyn, up
sterre,
And seyde thus, Nay, for hit is no neede
To trowen on the word, but on the dede.
I have a wyf, quod he, that, as I trowe,
Is holden good of alle that ever her knowe;
Go we tonight to Rome, and we shul see.

TARQUINIUS answerde, That lyketh me.
To Rome be they come, & faste hem dighte
To Colatynes hous, and doun they lighte,
The husbond knew the estres wel and fyne,
And prively into the hous they goon;
Nor at the gate porter was ther noon;
And at the chambre dore they abyde.
This noble wyf sat by her beddes syde
Dischevele, for no malice she ne thoghte;
And softe wolde our book seith that she wroghte
To kepen her fro slouthe and ydelnesse;
And bad her servants doon hir businesse,
And axeth hem: What tydings heren ye?
How seith men of the sege, how shal hit be?
God wolde the walles weren falle adoun;
My husbond is so longe out of this toun,
For which the dreed doth me so sore smerte,
Right as a swerd hit stingeth to myn herte
Whan I think on the sege or of that place;
God save my lord, I preye him for his grace:
And therewithal ful tenderly she weep,
And of her werk she took no more keep,
But mekely she leet her eyen falle;
And thilke semblant sat her wel withalle.
And eek her teres, ful of honestee,
Embellished her wyfely chastitee;
Her countenance is to her herte digne,
For they acordeden in dede and signe.
And with that word her husbond Colatyn,
Or she of him was war, com sterling in,
And seyde, Drede the noght, for I am here!
And she anon up roos, with blisful chere,
And kiste him, as of wyves is the wone.
TARQUINIUS, this proude kinges sone,
Conceived hath her beautee and her chere,
Her yelow heer, her shap, and her manere,
And by no craft her beautee nas nat feyned;
And caughte to this lady swich desyr,
That in his herte brende as any fyr
So woody, that his wit was al forgeten.
For wel, thoghte he, she sholde nat be geten;
And ay the more that he was in despair,
The more he coveteth and thoghte her fair.
His blinde lust was al his covetinge.
MORWHE, whan the brid began to singe,
Unto the sege he comth ful prively,
And by himself he walketh sobrelly,
Thimage of her recording alwey newe;
Thus lay her heer, and thus fresh was her hewe;
Thus sat, thus spak, thus span; this was her chere,
Thus fair she was, and this was her manere.
Al this conceit his herte hath now ytake.
And, as the see, with tempest al toshake,
That, after whan the storm is al ago,
Yet wol the water quappe a day or two,
Right so, thogh that her forme wer absent,
The plesaunce of her forme was present;
But natheles, nat plesaunce, but delyt,
Or an unrightful talent with despyt;
For, maugre her, she shal my lemman be;
Hap helpeth hardy man alday, quod he;
What ende that I make, hit shal be so;
ff 2

And girt him with his swerde, and gan to go;
And forth he rit til he to Rome is come,
And al aloon his wey than hath he nome
Unto the house of Colatyn ful right.
Doun was the sonne, and day hath lost his light;
And in he com unto a privy halke,
And in the night ful theefly gan he stalke,
Whan every night was to his reste broght,
Ne no wight had of tresoun swich a thoght.
Were hit by window or by other gin,
With swerde ydrawe, shortly he comth in
Ther as she lay, this noble wyf Lucesse.
And, as she wook, her bed she felte presse.
What beste is that, quod she, that weyeth thus?
I am the kinges sone, Tarquinius,
Quod he, but and thou crye, or noise make,
Or if thou any creature awake,
By thilke God that formed man on lyve,
This swerd throughout thyn herte shal I ryve.
And therewithal unto her throte he sterre,
And sette the point al sharp upon her herte.
No word she spak, she hath no might therto.
What shal she sayn? her wit is al ago.
Right as a wolf that fynt a lomb aloon,
To whom shal she compleyne, or make moon?
What! shal she fighte with an hardy knight?
Wel wot men that a woman hath no might.
What! shal she crye, or how shal she asterte
That hath her by the throte, with swerde at herte?
She axeth grace, and seith al that she can.
Ne wolt thou nat, quod he, this cruel man,
As wisly Jupiter my soule save,
As I shal in the stable slee thy knave,
And leye him in thy bed, and loude crye,
That I thee finde in suche avouterie;
And thus thou shalt be deed, and also lese
Thy name, for thou shalt non other chese.
THISE Romain wyves loveden so hir name,
At thilke tyme, and dredden so the shame,
That, what for fere of slaundre and drede
of deeth,
She loste bothe atones wit and breeth,
And in a swough she lay and wex so deed,
Men mighte smyten of her arm or heed;
She feleth nothing, neither foul ne fair.
TARQUINIUS, that art a kinges eyr,
And sholdest, as by linage and by right,
Doon as a lord and as a verray knight,
Why hastow doon dispyt to chivalrye?
Why hastow doon this lady vilanye?
Allas! of thee this was a vileins dede!
AT now to purpos; in the story I rede,
Whan he was goon, al this mischaunce is
falle.
This lady sente after her frendes alle,
fader, moder, husbond, al yfere;
And al dischevele, with her heres clere,
In habit swich as women used tho
Unto the burying of her frendes go,
She sit in halle with a sorweful sighte,
Her frendes axen what her aylen mighte,
And who was deed? And she sit ay wepinge,
A word for shame ne may she forth outbringe,
Ne upon hem she dorste nat beholde.

The
Legend of
Goode
Wimmen